

# Iowa Department of Agriculture and Land Stewardship Funds Management System

*IOWAccess Advisory Board  
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## Overview

The Iowa Department of Agriculture and Land Stewardship's (IDALS) Funds Management System (FMS) is envisioned to be a departmental-level system to help manage all of the various funds and grant programs that the department provides. The system will replace the current process, which is entirely paper-based, with an Internet-based system. The new system will guide and assist landowners throughout the process, starting with submitting their application for assistance through to actually getting their reimbursement check.

The goals for this project are to:

1. Educate landowners about the various funding programs available to help landowners improve their land management through the sharing of information.
2. Simplify and speed up the application process.
3. Reduce the time it takes to reimburse landowners after they have completed their projects.
4. Allow landowners to easily check the status of any practices they have enrolled in IDALS programs. IDALS programs map cleanly to funding sources and the funds are allocated to a set of allowable practices. So, for example, a landowner would be able to check the status of a claim for a terrace (i.e. practice) which is part of the watershed protection program.
5. Allow the IDALS central office to do real-time reporting and management of their funds. This will also allow the central office to check the status of the funds that were allocated to each of the 99 districts.
6. Streamline processes for district workers.
7. Provide a centralized database that will allow IDALS to answer legislative questions about the use and acceptance of their programs.

## Scope

ITE's original estimate was based on 2 assumptions. First, that the system IDALS envisioned was the same as the system they had investigated a couple of years ago. Second, that we would be able to reuse the discovery information compiled as a result of that investigation. Unfortunately, those assumptions have proven to be invalid. The new system has dramatically increased in both functionality and complexity. In addition, there will need to be a great deal of business process redesign in order to make the new system an integral part of the way the agency interacts with its customers, the citizens it serves.

## IDALS Funds Management System

- **Basic Financial Accounting**

Initial – This new system would manage the funds from appropriation through to landowner payout.

Envisioned – In the current accounting process, the funds for each program are managed separately for each year. IDALS has determined that this way of managing funds is unnecessarily complex and ITE has been helping them redesign the business processes in this area in order to simplify those processes and enhance their responsiveness.

- **Landowner Applications**

Initial – Landowners will be able to submit applications for the funding of projects by the various conservation programs through the system.

Envisioned – Landowners will be able to submit applications for the funding of projects by the various conservation programs through the system. This will include the acceptance and storage of electronic documents used to support the application. The new system will include basic workflow support to ensure the application process is a consistent manner across districts. This workflow process will also include routing claims tied to an account to IDALS central office for audit and approval by both accounting and management.

- **Accounting Interface**

Initial – The current payout process requires an extensive amount of paperwork both at the county and state level. In addition, there it involves manual data entry into IFAS in order to get the checks written and mailed.

Envisioned – The system will interface with the new accounting system, I/3. This will require a multi-step process in order to generate the necessary records. First a vendor record must be established for each landowner. This is a two step process that requires approval by the State Accounting Enterprise (SAE) before taking effect. Once the vendor record is established, the FMS system will then submit payment record that is associated with the vendor record. When that payment record is approved, the warrant is issued for the landowner. The process of programmatically creating vendor records is relatively new and introduces a level of risk to this function.

- **Landowner Payout**

Initial – The system must ensure that program payments to landowners are done in a timely manner and should reduce the amount of paperwork associated with their current process.

Envisioned – The system must ensure that program payments to landowners is done in a timely manner and should reduce the amount of paperwork associated with their current process. The current IDAL process is completely paper-based and requires, on average, a one inch stack of paperwork for each claim. The initial analysis severely underestimated the amount of information generated as part of an individual claim. The goal now

## IDALS Funds Management System

is that the new process will produce no more than a few sheets that can be faxed instead of mailed. A further complication has to do with the acceptability of faxed signatures for submitted paperwork. It is anticipated that resolving this issue satisfactorily will involve significant time and effort.

- **Reporting**

Initial – The system will have a basic system for producing reports.

Envisioned – The system will have a system for producing reports. It has been discovered that each of the 99 districts produces a number of reports unique to the way it wishes to see the data. A large task in the planning of the new system will involve working with the districts to identify a reasonable number of common reports that the districts can use to manage their funds.

- **GIS Subsystem**

Initial – Each Soil Conservation District (SCD) does a lot of data analysis using GIS. The planning work done did not include any consideration for GIS capabilities.

Envisioned – ITE needs to work with IDALS to ensure that there is sufficient information captured, and that it is stored in the appropriate format. This will require substantial work with IDALS GIS staff to review and define the needed data elements. It is IDALS intention to incorporate more robust GIS interfaces in future versions of the system.

- **Federal Database Integration**

Initial – Many of SCD's soil programs are tied to federal initiatives. The federal agencies managing these programs at the national level have database that the new system would interface with.

Envisioned – There was not a great deal of information available when the original information discovery was done and as a result minimal attention was given this facet. It has since been determined that implementing these interfaces has the potential to become significant efforts. Given the growth in scope to other areas, this functionality has been removed from the scope of the initial implementation.

## Project Benefits

This project is poised to provide a large number of benefits not only to the landowners, but also to IDALS districts and the central office.

- **Benefits to Landowners**

1. A streamlined application will be provided and be Web-enabled. This will be a convenience to the landowner wishing to apply for assistance by allowing them to submit applications from their homes at a time that is convenient for them.

## IDALS Funds Management System

2. Landowners will be able to check the status of any practices they have enrolled in an IDALS program online and without needing to wait for business hours.
3. Quicker turn around from the time the project is completed to the time the reimbursement is sent, improving cash flow and satisfaction for the customers.

- **Benefits to IDALS**

1. A new, consistent process implemented in all the districts.
2. A dramatic reduction in the amount of paperwork sent between the districts and central office.
3. Real time management of all program funds.
4. Real time reporting on funds at both the district and state level.
5. The ability for staff in one district to cover for another district in the case of illness, disability or other unforeseen circumstances.
6. Streamlined accounting practices.

### **The New Planning Budget**

Now that ITE has spent a considerable amount of time working with IDALS and reassessing the scope of the project we have developed the following estimate for completing planning:

Task	Hours
Data modeling	95
Process flows and requirements	130
Report mockups and review	195
Screen mockups and review	870
User meetings and administration	149
Total	1439

This results in a cost for Planning and Design of roughly \$140,000, which is the request being made of the Board. In reviewing the planning that results in this estimate, the big surprise was the total number of screens now anticipated, which is about 120. This system is somewhat larger, in terms of size and complexity, than the Supreme Court Commissions project that the Board is familiar with. When the two projects are compared, we do not feel the estimate of 120 total screens is unreasonable, and the costs per screen are comparable.